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Latin, America

REGIONAL AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS

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~~SECRET~~Chile: Christian Democratic Party in Eclipse?

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[REDACTED] Christian Democratic Party leader and former president Eduardo Frei painted a grim picture of conditions in Chile and revealed a sense of despondency over his party's precarious existence.

Frei's attitude, which reflects his own bitterness and pessimism over the party's plight, attests to the wider concern within the party over President Pinochet's order for its dissolution in March. Christian Democrats are also frustrated by the apparent continued substantial support for the military government and the fact that Pinochet has become more firmly established in power over the past year.

Frei spoke at length on the persecution of his party by the government. In addition to outlawing the party, the junta has silenced its principal radio and press outlets. Frei is obviously concerned that the tightening of official censorship will cause a further decline in the party's strength. While some Christian Democrats are clinging to the hope that they can publish a weekly news magazine soon, chances appear slim that it will receive official approval. The military leadership harbors particularly strong resentment of Frei's party and would like to see it dismantled permanently.

The former president [REDACTED] that while human rights conditions had improved substantially, the government's tactics had shifted to more subtle methods of stifling dissent. Frei said that his party is suffering the brunt of this campaign, and he cited some specific complaints:

--Increased government efforts to purge party members employed in all levels of the bureaucracy.

--Outright discrimination against Christian Democrats in redistributing land expropriated under Allende.

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--Intimidation of party members, particularly labor representatives, by the use of threats from intelligence organizations.

Under these circumstances, Frei sees little option open to his party other than concentrating on social and youth work at the local level.

Frei apparently believes that economic issues are the key to the military regime's survival. He described the current situation as bleak, claiming that the junta's economic policies would eventually lead to its downfall. [REDACTED] an implicit admission by Frei that he does not believe his party can offer any effective resistance to Pinochet. Christian Democratic aspirations have been pinned to the swiftly fading possibility that economic disaster would ultimately result in the replacement of Pinochet by a moderate military officer, thus opening the way for a rapprochement between the regime and the democratic parties and a return to the traditional political system.

[REDACTED] description of Frei as a sadder man [REDACTED] is visible testimony to the frustrations facing the elder statesman. The party's stumbling efforts to unify contending factions in Chile and in exile point up its generally weakened condition and perhaps are symptomatic of the deeper problem of trying to survive in the present repressive political atmosphere in Chile. Moreover, support for the party has ebbed because of stagnation and public apathy.

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